The President of the District Court in consultation with the Chief Justice and other Court Presidents has decided that the following additional measures concerning the business of the Court will be implemented from the 18th May 2020. These measures are a necessary response to the developing COVID-19 situation and the continued need to focus on prevention of community spread of COVID-19 while ensuring access to justice in a manner fully respecting public safety and considering Government public health advice

1. Parties with non-urgent cases are not required to attend court at this time.

2. The District Court will continue to hear urgent matters in all District Court Districts throughout the country and will resume hearings of certain urgent matters.

3. Urgent matters are now extended to include:

**(i) Criminal Law**
Attendance for Service of Books of Evidence and sending forward for trial on indictment; matters for sentencing where a guilty plea is indicated; the hearing of cases where an accused person is in custody on the charges before the court; resuming and concluding part-heard cases; prosecutions for alleged breaches of Domestic Violence Orders which have occurred during the emergency period; and hearing cases where there are garda witnesses only.

Remands where the accused is in custody should be dealt with by video-link wherever possible.

**(ii) Family Law**
New applications for protection orders or interim barring orders and return hearings of interim barring order cases. If safety order hearings are being adjourned interim protection orders will be extended to the new date.

Applications and hearings for breach of maintenance or access that have occurred during the emergency period or applications and hearings for temporary guardianship orders.

Remote call-overs and hearings may be conducted in some courts.

Consent orders that do not require the hearing of evidence may be applied for by email by the applicant’s solicitor exhibiting consent in writing from the respondent’s solicitor. Following consideration by an assigned Judge orders will issue from the Court Office as appropriate without the need for the parties or their legal representatives to attend court.

**(iii) Child Care Law**
Extension of care orders and interim care orders and emergency care orders and interim care orders.

Applications to regulate access, After-Care Reviews, part-heard Care Order Hearings and certain Care Order Hearings.

Remote call-overs and hearings may be conducted in some courts.

Consent orders that do not require the hearing of evidence may be applied for by email by the applicant’s solicitor exhibiting consent in writing from the respondents’ solicitors and the support of other participants on notice. Following consideration by an assigned Judge orders will issue from the Court Office as appropriate without the need for the parties or their legal representatives to attend court.

4. If your case is not included in the description of urgent matters above, then it is a non-urgent matter and parties do not need to attend court.

5. Solicitors are to inform clients that they do not need to attend where their case is a non-urgent matter.

6. Non-urgent cases will be adjourned, and parties will be informed of their new court dates by the Court Service by ordinary post or by their solicitor.

**Civil Matters**
7. All District Court Civil matters are at present considered to be non-urgent and will be adjourned generally with liberty to re-enter either on consent or on notice to the other party.

**Exceptions**
8. A case which does not come within the defined urgent category can be treated as urgent if a good case can be made. A party can email the relevant court office setting out the reasons why the case should be considered urgent. This should be on notice to the other side who must be given an opportunity to set out their position. An assigned Judge will assess if the matter may be treated as urgent.

**Public Safety Measures**9. Matters will be scheduled where the presiding judge is satisfied that there are proper measures in place in court rooms and at courthouses to ensure that social distances can be maintained and that the court environment is safe for witnesses and all court users to attend.

10. The Health Act Temporary Restrictions COVID 19 Regulations at Regulation 4 (l) permits members of the public to leave their homes to fulfil a legal obligation such as attending a court office or court. Schedule 2 of the Regulations at parts 10 and 14 recognises legal services and courts as essential services.

11. Scheduling may be conducted by call-over of lists requiring legal representatives and prosecutors only to attend, and may in some courts include remote call-over of lists,. Indications of pleas/consent at call-over and the avoidance of requiring witnessed to attend will be given the appropriate credit.

12. Cases will be managed to ensure that numbers coming to courts will be minimised wherever possible. This may include staggered lists, where smaller numbers of cases are required to be in courts at allocated times, or scheduled lists/hearings, where cases are scheduled according to time slots. Practioners and Court users are expected to exercise social distancing and other public health guidelines.

13. These measures will be constantly reviewed to ensure that the business of the District Court is being conducted safely. It is hoped that we will be able to incrementally increase the amount of work that can be safely carried out in the District Court in accordance with Government guidelines and the roadmap for reopening society and business.

14. This statement replaces in full the updated statement published on 16th March 2020. Practice Directions DC14 and DC16 are not affected.

His Honour Judge Colin Daly

President of the District Court